

Learning Points – Overtrick in 3NT

from Bruce Parent by Steve Moese (Mike Purcell ed.)

October 2, 2009

Declarer Play LEVEL: Intermediate

South Deals Both Vul IMPs	♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	Steve
♠ A5 ♥ 42 ♦ KQ985 ♣ AQJ9	N W 7 E S	♠ J103 ♥ AKJ8 ♦ 1072 ♣ K82
Mike	♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	E: 3N W:5N EW: 6♣, 6♦

Tuesday Evening September 22, 2009 International Fund Open Pairs,
Mike Lipp, Director, Cincinnati Bridge Association Bridge Center,
2860 Cooper Road, Cincinnati, OH 45241 (513) 631-8070 .

We are playing against one of the strongest pairs in the room.
Sometimes one overtrick is all you need for a good result.

The Bidding

Mike and I play Precision. We'll talk about this hand from the 2/1 and Standard perspective too. West evaluated his hand as too off-shape and texture for 1NT (we play 14+-17 HCP) so he opened 1♣ with this "minimum" big hand. Precision refers 16+ HCP hands (those not opened some number of NT) to 1♣. North chose to interfere with nothing, painting a hand with 5 or more hearts. In truth, North appears prepared to play in 2 of anything if partner can cooperate.

South	West	North	East
Pass	1♣ ¹	1♥ ²	Pass ³
Pass	Db1 ⁴	Pass	3N

All Pass

West Leads ♠2

1 = Strong Forcing Artificial 16+ HCP

2 = Let's interfere

3 = 0-5 HCP or Penalty Pass of H

4 = Reopening – Standard action with minimum balanced or semi-balanced hands.

When you play a strong ♣, creating space for strong-hand bidding often invites interference. We have sound tools to handle this.

East's pass is an either/or message: 0-5 HCP and any shape, or 8+ HCP and a desire to penalize or play in ♥. East judged the hand as slam worthy. Accepting the penalty would require a 3 trick set to

beat the value of our game – not likely if North has their bid. 3N seems like a reasonable compromise – Partner knows that East has at least the equivalent of 2 stoppers in ♥ and 10 or more HCP. With a sound 18-19 HCP, West will make one more move were slam in the picture. With a stronger hand, West would begin with a cue-bid after the reopening double. With only 4 ♥ East would insist on NT or support East's long minor suit.

The Play

Before playing to the 1st trick, declarer can count 28 HCP and 7 top tricks. The ♥ finesse should produce the 8th. A finesse for the ♦A will develop the 9th. The only risk is if opponents can run 5 tricks (♠ seem threatening) before we win 9. Slam looks like it need 2 finesses right, plus a favorable position in ♦. This means *a priori* success probability for small slam is less much than 25% - not a wise choice.

South expects East to stop ♥ and rightly looks to create problems elsewhere. ♠ are a good start for the defense. The ♠2 suggests ♠ are likely split 4-4. East ducks toward the ♠J to eliminate a ♠ entry for North. North wins the ♠Q and duly clears ♠ returning the ♠4 to the ♠A in dummy. The ♠4 return confirms ♠ are 4-4. Declarer wins in dummy per force, and finesses the ♥J. This wins so declarer turns attention to ♦. While a finesse of the ♦J seems appealing, simply locating the ♦A is enough to make game. East chooses to postpone the ♦J finesse. Perhaps the location of the ♦A will disclose something useful.

The ♦2 to the ♦Q wins. Now East has to choose between ♥ and ♣ to return to hand. The idea is to repeat the finesse of the ♦A. Since playing dummy's last ♥ breaks communication with the closed hand in that suit, declarer chooses to lead a small ♣ to the ♣K. The ♦10 fetches the ♦4 from South. **Do you finesse for the ♦J?**

One line of thinking is to count Useful Space in each defender's hand. North has shown 2♠s and ♥ length, perhaps 5. That leaves 6 useful spaces for the ♦J. East has shown 4♠s, 1♥ and 3♦ (We infer South holds the ♦A here – or North is playing a very deep game). That leaves 5 spaces for the ♦J. 5/11 odds argues against the ♦J finesse. But it is still just a guess, nothing more nor less. Here East knows South has the ♦A so the ♦K will score.

East put up the ♦K swallowing North's ♦J. *What's declarer's best play now?*

The defense will take 4 tricks (3♠ and 1♦) if declarer continues diamonds at this point. Best for East to cash out – taking 4♣, 2♦, 3♥, and 1♠ for 10 tricks.

East claimed 3N making 4 for +430 and 6 of 7 Match Points.

Pair	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
MP	0.5	2	4	4	7	6	0.5	4
Score	-100	130	600	600	660	630	-100	600

Were you defending, would you find the duck of the ♦A on the 2nd ♦ trick? (How about the duck on the 1st ♦ trick?) That 2nd duck gave declarer a legitimate chance to go wrong on the hand. Finessing the ♦J loses 2♦s and 3♠s for down 1 and a top for North South. Interesting how one sound play creates a top/bottom swing opportunity.

Post Mortem

North was unhappy about South's ♦A duck at trick 6. Declarer has 9 tricks already when East leads the 2nd ♦ toward the board. South can count tricks and choose to win the ♦A then cash the ♠K to see if the defense gets their 3♠ tricks, or risk a bad result. Ducking the ♦A a 2nd time gives declarer the maximum chance to go wrong.

South Deals Both Vul IMPs	♠ Q874 ♥ Q765 ♦ J6 ♣ 643	Steve								
♠ A5 ♥ 42 ♦ KQ985 ♣ AQJ9	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>N</td> <td>♠ J103</td> </tr> <tr> <td>W 7</td> <td>♥ AKJ8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>E</td> <td>♦ 1072</td> </tr> <tr> <td>S</td> <td>♣ K82</td> </tr> </table>	N	♠ J103	W 7	♥ AKJ8	E	♦ 1072	S	♣ K82	
N	♠ J103									
W 7	♥ AKJ8									
E	♦ 1072									
S	♣ K82									
Mike	♠ K962 ♥ 1093 ♦ A43 ♣ 1075	E: 3N W:5N EW: 6♣, 6♦								

A simple scenario for East West to make 11 tricks requires either a heart lead by South (East declares) or West to declare against a ♠ or ♥ lead from North. Careful play along the lines above limits defense to 2 tricks – evidence that South's opening lead was inspired.

A - 2/1 and Standard			
South	West	North	East
Pass	1♦	Pass	1♥
Pass	2♣ ¹	Pass	2♠ ²
Pass	3♦	Pass	4♦
Pass	4♠ ^{3?}	Pass	5♦ ^{4?}
All Pass			

1 = Conservatively saving 3C for 18+ HCP
 2 = 4th Suit Forcing to Game
 3 = 1st Round control
 4 = With poor trumps, 5♣ showing the ♣K is too high – partner cannot check for key cards. Better 5♠ to show the ♣A, or ♣K with ♦A. Can bid 4NT (RKCB).

Standard bidders have several paths to reach contracts of 3N and 5♦. While 6♣ makes double dummy, playing in a 7 card fit seems absurd. 6♦ also makes but is a poor contract requiring 2 finesses and a good split in diamonds. The actual probability is 0.5 x 0.5 x 0.678 or **17%**.

B - 2/1 and Standard			
South	West	North	East
Pass	1♦	Pass	1♥
Pass	2♣	Pass	2♠ ²
Pass	3N	All Pass	
All Pass			

Playing 2/1 West's choice at the 3rd bid determines whether East/West get to the higher paying NT or the lower paying 5♦. Some pairs will open West's hand 1NT but that's a poor choice – the texture and shape are both wrong. Those pairs should have a Stayman auction to 3N with West declaring. Some East's might forego Stayman figuring the 3433 shape offers no ruffing value. Were the honor texture more

evenly balanced 1N would be a prudent opening bid. With only 1 HCP in the pointed suits, looking for a ♥ fit seems right.

Aggressive bidders might choose to jump shift with West's hand. This is a mild overbid. The real dilemma with many minor suit hands like this is how to be able to stop at 4NT if the bidding investigation suggests no slam. Playing RKC this is nearly impossible. If you add Minorwood to your tool kit then you just might be able to stop in 4N when right.

C - 2/1 and Standard			
South	West	North	East
Pass	1♦	Pass	1♥
Pass	3♣	Pass	3♦
Pass	3♠ ¹	Pass	4♥ ¹
Pass	4N	Pass	5♦ ²
Pass	6♦ ³	All Pass	

1 = Cue Bid 2 = 1 or 4 Key Cards
 3 = Too aggressive. Where does West's ♠ loser go?

Minorwood Responses:

MW	Resp	Meaning	Q-ask	K-ask
4♣:	4♦ _o	0 or 3	4♥ _r	4♠ _r
	4♥ _o	1 or 4	4♠ _r	5♦ _r
	4♠ _o	2 w/o ♣Q	NA	5♦ _r
	4N _o	2w/♣Q	NA	5♦ _r
4♦:	4♥ _o	0 or 3	4♠ _r	5♣ _r
	4♠ _o	1 or 4	5♣ _r	5♥ _r
	4N _o	2 w/o ♦Q	NA	5♥ _r
	5♣ _r	2w/♦Q	NA	5♥ _r

We recommend 4N_o and 5 of agreed minor by either partner to be ALWAYS to play. With RKCB, the 1st two responses say nothing about the trump Q. Here step 1 asks for the Q and step 2 asks for K (and promises the Q). We like specific kings but that's up to your partnership.

This specially named version of RKCB occurs when

we have identified a minor suit fit at the 3 level or below. Then the bid of 4 of the agreed minor is RKC. Simply, using 4 of our minor to invite game in that minor wastes a valuable slam tool, and misdirects us to a minor suit game (often we will score as well or better in 3N. You have to decide whether Minorwood is on in a competitive auction to avoid confusion. Sometimes we need to compete in our suit to the 4 level. You should also talk about how Minorwood and cue bidding appear to overlap.

Learning Points

1. Let the auction guide your play. When a finesse for the A works, repeating it might yield a great score.
2. Plan your play to keep communications fluid between hands.
3. East could have improved play – by returning to hand in ♥ a 2nd time instead of revealing the ♣K. Keeping the ♣K hidden obscures declarer's tricks and might better induce South to duck the ♦A a 2nd time.
4. Just because the double dummy analyzer says you can make it doesn't mean you should bid it. Stay out of low percentage slams.

Key Words: Competitive Bidding, Reading Cards, Low Percentage Slams, Minorwood